

Comprehensive Summary:

The Remembrance Project Summaries reflects a series of seven (7) focus groups conducted across variegated communities in Cambridge and Boston, MA. Groups were adults reflecting a broad range in socio-economic and educational status, class, ability, marital status, gender identities, and religious and non-religious affiliations. Participants identified as both Black, White, with few non-Black and non-White participants. No persons openly identified as Indigenous. Participants were assured confidentiality and anonymity, except in cases where participants request to be identified for direct quotations. Each participant was offered a \$25.00 incentive for their time and any expenses incurred. The majority of participants expressed interest in continuing conversation with First Church Cambridge regarding the Remembrance Project and hope to have an opportunity to help shape and guide its development.

These conversational circles in the form of focus groups fostered transparency, safer-space, respect for every voice, and value for the communities impacted by racialized violence and harm.

Many participants affirmed the importance of the focus groups and wanted more detailed history about First Church in Cambridge, and felt that the Project must include the voices of more everyday people in the community—people who are still the most impacted by these historical actions of white institutions like First Church in Cambridge. Participants felt strongly that financial and material reparations are critical starting points for repair, as well varying forms of education and radical un-learning of racism, and policy changes. During focus groups participants consistently pointed to the structural roots of racism that makes it difficult to change inequality. They noted that white supremacy and racism are primarily structural and that white people must first address the issue of their participation and power in maintaining racist structures. In addition, participants believe that political education is an important solution for upending ignorance and building a spirit of anti-racism. One dominant motif from the conversations is that without an understanding of our history and our place within it, we absolve ourselves from systems of harm in the present.

The discussions make clear that ignorance can largely be credited to centuries of United States history books, curriculum, and other forms of propaganda that fail to condemn Whiteness. The groups often suggested rewriting history or providing inclusive histories, in order to shed light on the truth of US history. However, the group also suggested different historical texts, including, films such as 13th (Netflix Documentary), A Case for Reparations by Ta-Nehisi Coates, Golden Gulag by Ruth Gilmore, White Fragility by Robin DiAngelo, and 1619 by Nikole Hannah-Jones. The idea is education, education, education. Groups felt that white people do not understand Black peoples' history, culture, or perspectives, but also that that everyone has been miseducated. It's important to note that groups emphasized that historical accounts and lived experiences of Black and Indigenous peoples should be produced and told by those groups.

The discussions also suggested that implementing a public memorial or accessible museum to relay information to the general public who does not attend school may be useful but limited. This

intervention is woefully insufficient and certainly is not the most important starting point because people value different things. Monuments or symbolic gestures are not necessarily that meaningful to people who are dying, or don't have what they need to survive. Participants indicated in order to have community support, First Church in Cambridge must first listen to the community at larger (everyday people) and their leadership of the Project must be respected because they are the ones experiencing harm.

The groups generally expressed uncertainty about what to do or where to go with this idea of new comprehensive education. They suggested that white people shoulder a large burden in redistributing financial resources, mobilizing causes, increasing diversity among elected officials, and using their positionality to achieve material benefits for people who have been harmed. The group advocated for the need for an exploratory process which examines anti-racist systemic change on an individual, local, and national level. Most groups advocated for the leadership of affected communities in this process not driven by the white people some do not care to work with white people at all due to lack of trust and confidence. At the end of the day, educational systems need to be very different from what we know.

The groups suggested that First Church could also serve as a model to institutions with similar history by *publicly* atoning and finding ways to repair the violence they perpetuated. Some of these solutions included increasing diversity and power among church leadership, and mobilizing their congregation to advocate for policies that benefit Black and Indigenous communities. Again, the leadership of these communities are key, and First Church would support and follow not lead these efforts. Also suggested is that First Church should partner with other institutions and organizations that are already committed to doing anti-racist work. Overall, group participants were eager to have more conversation with First Church regarding the Remembrance project and participate in its development

Focus Group #1

Participants' joined this group because of their prior exposure to the history of US chattel slavery. Participants acknowledge that they previously believed Uncle Tom's Cabin to be less representative of reality at the time of its publishing, and that they "were taught a very white centric view of history growing up." Their exposure spurred an interest in learning more and a feeling of responsibility to do more.

Their discussion and suggestions were largely aimed at white communities, and specifically what First Church could do to atone for its history involving slavery, and how to improve the material realities of black and indigenous folks. Participants wish for First Church to apologize and publicly acknowledge its history. At best, they want First Church to be a role model for institutions grappling with how to address their relationship with slavery. The participants suggest diversifying First Church's leadership; fostering a space that invites more diversity within the congregation; partnering with black churches; sharing Church spaces and resources with black and indigenous

communities; organizing the congregation to stand with and for historically disenfranchised communities at rallies, policy hearings, vigils, etc.; and involving the Cambridge community.

The participants suggested reflecting on how one's own behavior perpetuates the harm black and indigenous communities experience, relinquishing privilege to black and indigenous communities, and reading books like "White Fragility," to learn more about white supremacy. The participants suggested taxing wealthy individuals and families, and implementing a tax-funded, uncapped reparations endowment. This endowment will serve the purpose of alleviating poverty, improving schools, increasing access to land ownership, and redistributing power to black and indigenous communities, by increasing diversity among elected officials.

The participants recommend broad solutions for upending white supremacy, and not limiting their efforts to a single program or project.

Focus Group #2

The participants in this group self-identified as possessing perspectives on reparations. This perspective led to participants being interested in learning more, feeling obligated to do more, and addressing their feelings of guilt ("Am I my brother's keeper?").

The participants reflected on the perspective that "the racism that has been so invisible to white people,"—they spoke about de jure racism which disenfranchised black and indigenous communities, school curriculum, and unavoidable "white privilege." They agreed that public education and awareness is vital for understanding Whiteness and anti-racism, though not an end-all solution. They understood that it is hard to define and embrace a solution without a clear understanding of the problem. They discussed the shortcomings of the American education system ("I thought I got a really good education, but... they didn't tell me that [Abraham] Lincoln wanted to send Black people back to Africa"). They mentioned family members who presumed racism ended with the abolition of slavery, and admitted that they too were not fully aware of the breadth of their privilege. They expressed hope for First Church and its congregation to be committed to fostering "change." This hope led to them questioning how The Remembrance Project's findings were going to be presented to First Church.

The expressed an interest in the Church taking substantive action towards integrating the congregation, employing more inclusive leadership, advocating and voting for policy and systemic change, sharing church resources with local black and indigenous communities, partnering with black churches, somehow factoring in descendants of the enslaved people whose labor First Church has benefitted from, coordinating with GBIO to scale up such action, and remaining committed to such action for a prolonged period of time. The participants also questioned how involved white people should be throughout the process (from ideation to execution). Some thought that white people should do all the work and spare black and indigenous communities from putting forth any effort. The majority of participants felt that it was important for white communities to work with

black and indigenous communities to find and enact solutions (“How can we [alone] have a solution to this?”). They recommended listening to the voices within those communities, and for white people to navigate relationships with humility and mindfulness. They also suggested specific solutions like an interactive project like a public memorial, similar to the monument in Alabama for victims of racial terrorism.

Focus Group #3

The participants in this focus group attested that they joined this focus group to receive the stipend. Other participants mentioned wanting to hear others’ opinions on the subject of reparations, and expressed an interest in learning how the church planned to address its history with slavery. One individual believed that black people had already received reparations in the form of 40 acres and a mule, and, during a lengthy exchange regarding affirmative action, one participant was insistent on getting affirmative action categorized as reparations

Another participant suggested ending regional segregation and integrating American cities as a solution, while another proposed creating “Opportunity Zones” - areas of major monetary and resource investment for deprived black people to live in and take advantage of. The participants tended to agree that history taught in schools “was not necessarily true.” One participant suggested that younger generations should be educated on the truth, while another believed the appropriate recourse was to simply move forward. Another participant suggested “holding African countries accountable” and sending black people “back to Africa to rebuild.”

The participants were able to find more common ground with one another when it came to the idea that younger people will upend racism in their lifetime. They also specifically called for The Remembrance Project to include more young people in these focus groups.

The prevailing sentiment within this group tended to skew more right of center, and several participants suggested encouraging black youth to be more creative about how they pull themselves up by their bootstraps as a viable solution.

Focus Group #4

Participants in this group chose to participate because they already developed a perspective on the importance of reparations in resolving racism.

The group agreed that white people have been “overfilling themselves on the communion that is America for 400+ years - incurring a spiritual sickness as a result - and that now is the time to end that overindulgence and allow for black and indigenous communities to come to the proverbial table as well.” The group discussed experiencing dismissiveness from other white people in response to reparations. The participants questioned whether the white community is invested enough in finding and executing solutions. The group suggests providing political education around racism, its harms, and how specific communities benefit from those harms. This group

suggests creating inclusive school curriculum. The participants agreed that without this reeducation and unlearning, reparations would foster resentment and could lead to racial violence.

The participants discussed the possibility of addressing racism through filing a lawsuit, prioritizing the needs of “at-risk communities,” abdicating position and power to black and indigenous people, and exposing one’s self to different cultures.

The participants suggest tracking down institutions that have benefitted from slavery, and creating a map to compare the average household income and education level of white members of the institution with the descendants of people who were enslaved. They suggest using that data to inform atonement. They suggest renaming the project since “remembrance” suggests that the harm done isn’t ongoing, adding significant diversity to First Church’s leadership, engaging with and listening to black and indigenous communities, using the power and numbers of First Church’s congregation to support policy change, and speaking out against issues that disproportionately affect communities of color. The participants also suggested publicizing First Church’s ties to slavery in the form of a public exhibition or otherwise, and to relinquish the property of all white churches to black and indigenous people.

Focus Group #5

These group members chose to participate because of a strong interest in reparations, some even stated they would die for reparations to be distributed. A small number of participants also noted that they were participating to receive stipends.

The group noted that slavery and white supremacy seeps into government, medicine, religion, and education. One participant noted the racism of Harvard - citing the fact that eugenics were taught at the university.

The participants questioned whether any solution would ever be enough to end white supremacy, and they asserted that statues, monuments, plaques, and other superficial gestures would not be enough. One participant noted that white supremacy is not only embodied but structural, and dismantling it begins with structural changes that come with reorganizing power. However, they did suggest ethnic studies/anti-racist curriculum, monthly livable stipends for black people, free college tuition for black people, grants, interest-free business loans for black people, tax-free land for black people, individual tax exemption for black people, abolishing the provision of the 13th amendment that permits the enslavement of people who are incarcerated, ending white nepotism, and diversifying our spheres of government are some ways to begin. There was a common emphasis on material and financial reparations as a critical starting point, but also an acknowledgement that these were not enough. They also uplifted healing generational trauma, and overhauling the US Constitution to include input from black and indigenous folks. The U.S. democracy needs to be reimagined to include all people.

The participants suggested that First Church should publicize their history with slavery, and demand other institutions to hold themselves equally accountable. First Church would have greater integrity with transparency, and should continue to coordinate more focus groups geared anti-racist education for white congregants and community members. For future Remembrance Project focus groups, suggested including visual aids, more of the regular community of black people or indigenous, and providing more time for discussion among participants. Participants supported the idea of focus groups and think more spaces for open community conversations are necessary if the project is to have community support.

The participants also expressed doubt in white people, including the facilitators of this focus group, who they presumed to be white. They did not trust white people to act earnestly by relinquishing money, property, and privilege for the sake of upending racism: “[historically] when we did trust, they stole from us.” Finally, participants expressed a need for potentially exclusive black involvement in the designing of questions and decision-making, and greater opportunities for participants to voice their thoughts to the church leadership.

Focus Group #6

The participants in this specific group noted that they chose to participate given their personal experiences with racialized trauma, or close relationships with people who have experienced racial trauma. They noted the sparse opportunities for constructive conversations about racism, and joined this group because they felt talking about racism is important.

Despite their interests in conversations about racism, this group expressed concern about reparations, particularly as a lump sum given to adults. One member commented that reparations would likely lead to frivolous spending rather than generational wealth, and other group members uplifted a proposed provision of resources, like the idea of “a stimulus for a new generation” in which black youth are guaranteed a free education from kindergarten through college plus \$200K upon graduating to achieve the same goals. Other proposals included establishing a “protected class” for Black Americans, educating communities on America’s history of racism, and building an organization which promotes racial justice dialogue.

The group was most supportive of financial independence or “financial literacy,” and addressing mass incarceration. Group members suggested that Black Americans should be given land trusts and trade-based education to further their “self-sufficiency.” They also noted the importance of investing “black money” into black businesses, and establishing afro-centric centers of learning that serve to displace the hold of Western European educational institutions. The participants see mass incarceration and imprisonment as modern-day slavery, with one describing it as “enslavement on a mental and spiritual level.” They participants felt that First Church could make a direct intervention in this issue by providing or supporting an after-school program to prevent

kids from entering the school to prison pipeline, and establishing a re-entry program to ease formerly incarcerated individuals' transition back into society. This group felt strongly that "real" action and interventions are necessary.

The group expressed concern about the capacity for First Church and their white congregants to work towards undoing racism because of class issues. And, one participant said, "bluntly, I don't think there's anything that white people can do to undo the cancer on our society." Still, the group proposed other tangible interventions for First Church including hiring black mental health and healing workers to do community outreach, or creating a black business fund that First Church could match.

Focus Group #7 (on Zoom)

The participants in this focus group were interested and actively engaged in anti-racist work and advocacy around reparations.

These participants acknowledged that discussing reparations and resolving racism with white people can be difficult, yet they uplifted the import of raising awareness with difficult populations. They suggested replacing the word "reparation," with "investment" in order to combat white resistance. The participants advised an audit and rewriting of school curriculums (K-12, university) to ensure they are more inclusive and honest about white supremacy.

They challenged First Church to serve as a model by publicly atoning for its history, and partnering with Harvard to design educational programs. They believed that dialogues about wealth redistribution would empower black people to be more than just consumers. They suggested that First Church can use its power and position to support policy change.